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SUBJECT: AUSTRIA'S NEW CABINET: CHANCELLOR FAYMANN

**¶1.** (U) The following is a profile of Werner Faymann, leader of Austria's Social Democratic Party (SPO), who has been named Chancellor in the new GOA government.

Experience

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**¶2.** (U) Faymann, who served as Minister for Transportation and Technology in the short-lived Gusenbauer cabinet, was sworn in as Chancellor on December 2, 2008. He was born May 4, 1960. Faymann studied law for a few semesters but soon focused on his role as chairman of the Vienna chapter of the Socialist Youth, a position he occupied from 1985 to 1993. From 1985 to 1988, Faymann worked as a consultant with an SPO-owned Vienna banking institute. From 1988 to 1994 he served as member of the Vienna city parliament. In this capacity, he headed the Vienna Association of Tenants - a powerful Viennese lobby. In 1994 Vienna's SPO Mayor Michael Haeupl appointed him City Councilor for Housing and Urban Renewal - a job he held until his appointment as Minister for Transportation in spring 2007.

In June 2008 Faymann replaced the increasingly unpopular Gusenbauer as SPO chairman.

**¶3.** (U) The articulate Faymann is widely viewed as a non-ideological pragmatist with excellent networking talents. This is reflected in his strong inner-party approval ratings, his ability to reach across party lines, and his highly visible presence in the country's tabloid media. He is said to work smoothly with OVP Chairman and Vice Chancellor Josef Proell, with whom he cooperated well when both served as their respective parties' coalition coordinators during the Gusenbauer government. In an effort to mend frayed relations between the government and its "social partners" (labor and business), Faymann nominated Trade Union President Rudolf Hundstorfer as Labor Minister and Economic League Secretary General Reinhold Mitterlehner as Economics Minister.

**¶4.** (U) Faymann enjoys strong, almost embarrassingly enthusiastic backing from Austria's largest tabloid "Kronenzeitung," as well as, to a lesser degree, from the tabloid "Osterreich" and the weekly "News." Some critics have accused him of engaging in populist rhetoric while ignoring difficult challenges.

Family

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**¶5.** (U) Faymann is divorced and has remarried. He has two children.

Comment: Small Majority, Big Plans

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**¶6.** (U) Faymann heads the smallest "grand coalition" in Austria's post-WWII history, as the two governing parties command only 59 percent of the parliamentary seats -clearly short of the two-thirds majority needed to push through constitutional reforms. Faymann's government agenda is nonetheless ambitious: he plans to enact two economic stimulus packages to jump-start Austria's stalling economy, implement generous tax reform policies in 2009, appropriate considerable funds for family policy, increase the police force by 1,000 officers, and inject half a million euros into the country's

chronically indebted health insurance carriers.

GIRARD-DICARLO